

The
Melville Society
N E W S L E T T E R

DECEMBER, 1950

Volume VI

Number 4

ANNUAL MEETING

The official time and place of our annual meeting: **Thursday, December 28, at 3:00 p.m. in Room 213, New York Public Library.**

President Elizabeth Foster has arranged a program that should be of great interest to all members. Following are some of the items:

Report of the secretary.

Report on the Collected Edition.

Other reports on research in progress.

Two short papers by Harrison Hayford—"New Light on Melville's Manipulation of Source Materials."

Discussion by Howard P. Vincent of discoveries relating to **White-Jacket**.

Discussion of the **Moby-Dick** centennial, with a report from Stuart C. Sherman.

Election of a member of the executive committee for a five-year term.

Other business.

The general emphasis this year will be upon **White-Jacket**. As usual, the presentation of papers and reports will be informal, with ample opportunity for a good "gam."

Please remember to visit the exhibit of Melville materials which the staff of the New York Public Library has kindly arranged for our pleasure and benefit.

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MORE ABOUT THE PEQUOD

About Melville's reason for calling his whaling ship **Pequod**—here's another guess:

In 1839, at Vernon, N. Y., was published a slim pamphlet of 21 pages entitled **Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Paul Cuffe, a Pequot Indian: During Thirty Years Spent at Sea, and in Travelling in Foreign**

Lands. The author, a harpooner, was the son of the famous Sierra Leone colonizer Paul Cuffe (pronounced Cuff), and made his first voyage when only twelve. Of mixed Negro and Pequot blood, the younger Cuffe was a man with tremendous physical strength and an adventurous spirit. He was only 43 years old when his **Narrative** was published, and although I am unable to trace his activities after 1839, it is a reasonable assumption that he continued before the mast as a harpooner.

Cuffe's **Narrative** apparently sold well. Despite its perishable nature, copies are quite frequently met with today. Almost certainly Melville read the pamphlet, for it must have been a very common sight at the book-stalls in the 1840's. Perhaps Melville even knew Cuffe, whose personality and interesting history, including a five months' residence among the natives of the Society Islands, would surely have appealed to Melville's imagination.

If Melville was acquainted with Cuffe or his pamphlet, it is possible that this acquaintance imprinted the tribal name **Pequod** in his mind; more, it is just barely possible that Cuffe served as prototype for one of Melville's aboriginal harpooners—maybe even Queequeg.

—Charles Hamilton

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NOTES

Enclosed with this issue is the dust jacket of Henry F. Pommer's **Milton and Melville**, containing interesting information about the book and its author.

The publication of a brief note entitled "Naming the **Pequod**" in the September number of the Newsletter has raised the question as to whether such an item should be signed. Members may wish to discuss matters of this kind at our annual meeting. The

editor's policy, to date, has been as follows: The major purpose of the Newsletter is to furnish news about the activities of our members, reports on Melville research and publications, and occasional items of special interest which would not normally appear in more formal scholarly periodicals. The editor is responsible for all materials except those to which another person's name is attached. He has now and then indulged himself in the pleasure of a brief editorial comment.

Gordon Roper is preparing a centenary article on *Moby-Dick* for the **Dalhousie Review**.

C. Merton Babcock has been granted a small research fund by Michigan State College for the development of a Melville glossary or lexicon. The project, on which preliminary work has begun, will probably require at least two years. Babcock writes: "My plan is to do a study similar to the Missouri Mark Twain lexicon." His article on "Melville's Backwoods-Seamen" is scheduled for early publication in **Western Folklore**.

Why not an American National Portrait Gallery, with Melville's portrait among the rest? This is an idea in which John H. Birss has been interested. Perhaps other members may have comments to make on the subject, or proposals for action.

Samuel T. Sukel has recently suggested to the School Building Commission of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, that one of three new school buildings to be erected in the city be named for Herman Melville. He believes that letters from our members addressed to the editor of the **Berkshire Evening Eagle** (Pittsfield) might add encouragement to the proposal.

Montgomery Belgium delivered his lecture on Melville (as announced in the June 1950 issue of the Newsletter) before the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, on Monday, November 27. If the lecture is printed, the secretary will investigate the possibility of securing copies for our members.

FINANCIAL REPORT

For the first time since its founding, the Society ends the year with a financial deficit.

On hand, January 1, 1950\$ 36.94

Income to December 15, 1950

Membership fees paid..\$93.00

Interest on deposit 39

Contribution 1.00

131.33

Expenses paid

Postage 35.97

Envelopes, etc., ... 6.30

Printing 48.00

Harvard Lib.

(reprints) 35.00

Incidentals 1.28

126.55

On hand, December 15, 1950 4.78

Expenses unpaid

December printing 16.00

Harvard Lib. balance ... 48.20

Postage 3.42

Envelopes 2.00

69.62

Amount of deficit\$ 64.84

As we all know, the deficit has been caused by the decision of the members to purchase copies of the check-list of Melville's reading originally published in the **Harvard Library Bulletin**. The total bill, not counting postage, amounted to \$83.20, of which \$35.00 has been paid. Harvard has agreed to postponement of the balance for a few months. It may be necessary to consider an increase in dues to cover the deficit and to make possible other services of the same kind.

Is membership in the Society worth another dollar per year? If not, we might consider eliminating some of our present services, such as the distribution of offprints. We might issue fewer numbers of the Newsletter or prepare it on the mimeograph. Presumably this matter will be discussed at our business meeting.

THE *Melville Society* NEWSLETTER

IS PUBLISHED THREE OR FOUR TIMES EACH YEAR

for the members of the Melville Society, a group of scholars and other persons interested in the life and works of Herman

Melville. The Society seeks to facilitate the exchange of information among its members, to stimulate the study of Melville's life and works, and to contribute toward the improvement of the facilities for literary, historical, and bibliographical research.

Membership (including subscription to the Newsletter) may be secured through payment of one dollar annually to the Secretary, Tyrus Hillway, 423 Pequot Avenue, New London, Connecticut.